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Utah Government Affairs 2018 Election Update – Part 2

Insight — 11/30/2018

The last two weeks have been a roller coaster as Utah awaited the results of multiple “too close to call” races and a proposition. One race, Utah Congressional District 4 between Representative Mia Love and Salt Lake County Mayor Ben McAdams, has gone back and forth as vote counts were updated daily by different counties. The race could not be called until the final day of vote counting. The race was won by McAdams, who unseated Love by just 694 votes.

There are multiple factors contributing to the delayed ballot counting. Utah has increasingly become a “vote by mail” state. While Utah has had the option for voters to submit ballots by mail for over a decade, the mail alternative has gained steam only in the last few election cycles with most counties now mailing ballots directly to voters. Utah’s Lt. Governor, who oversees elections in the state, estimates that 80% of this year’s voters chose mail over in-person voting, and county clerks were still collecting mailed ballots as they trickled in.

Another factor causing delayed results is Utah’s increased voter turnout – there was no traditional mid-term slump in voter participation. When all the ballots are counted, the Lt. Governor’s office expects that Utah will have 70% voter participation this cycle. In the previous mid-term election year (2014), only 46% of registered voters participated.

For a great explanation of Utah’s ballot counting process, check out Lt. Governor Spencer Cox’s Medium article on this year’s ballot processing experience.

Updated Election Results

Utah Congressional District 4

The battle between Salt Lake County Mayor Ben McAdams and Rep. Mia Love went down to the wire. The 694-vote margin puts this race just outside the margin for an automatic recount. Love took a 1,500-vote lead on the next to last day, but the final count from Salt Lake County pushed McAdams over the line. McAdams may have benefited from voters who supported Prop 2, Utah’s medical marijuana ballot measure. Many pundits believe those voting in favor of the proposition would support a Democratic candidate. This is the second loss for Love while sharing the ballot with Senator-Elect Mitt Romney. Love first ran for the 4th Congressional seat in 2012, the same year Romney challenged President Obama, but lost her bid that year. Romney again was on the ballot this year running for U.S. Senate.

Proposition #4

Voters approved Utah's ballot measure to create an Independent Redistricting Commission. The proposition appeared to be in jeopardy of passing, but it passed by more than 7,000 votes. Utah will now have a seven-member Commission that will meet after the 2020 census to recommend new boundaries for Utah's U.S. House seats and the districts for state legislature and the state school board. The Commission will recommend boundaries to the legislature which then must accept or reject the recommendation.

Utah Legislature Races

One race in the state house, District 8, has flipped since the initial election night results. Republican candidate Steve Waldrip has taken the lead in the vote count over Democrat Deana Froerer. This is an open seat. Waldrip currently holds a 210-vote lead on Froerer. If Waldrip holds on to win, Republicans will hold 60 seats in the House to 15 for the Democrats.

Utah Legislature Leadership Races

With both the current Speaker of the House and Senate President retiring from Utah's legislature, new leadership teams were selected to lead each body for the next two years.

In the Senate, Republican Stuart Adams (R-Layton) was elected by his colleagues to become the next Senate president. The Senate Majority leader will now be Sen. Evan Vickers (R-Cedar City), Senate Majority Whip is Sen. Dan Hemmert (R-Orem) and Sen. Ann Millner (R-Ogden) will serve as the Assistant Majority Whip. For the Democrats, Sen. Karen Mayne (D-West Valley City) will serve as the Minority Leader. Sen. Luz Robles (D-Salt Lake City) will serve as the Minority Whip with Sen. Jani Iwamoto (D-Salt Lake City) as the Assistant Minority Whip and Sen. Derek Kitchen (D-Salt Lake City) as the Minority Caucus Manager.

For the House, the Republicans elected Rep. Brad Wilson (R-Kaysville) to serve as House Speaker. Rep. Francis Gibson (R-Mapleton) was elected to be the House Majority Leader. Rep. Mike Schultz (R-Hooper) will serve as the Majority Whip with Rep. Val Peterson (R-Orem) serving as the Assistant Majority Whip. Rep. Brian King (D-Salt Lake City) will serve as the Minority Leader for the Democrats in the House. He will be joined by Rep. Carol Spackman Moss (D-Holladay), who will serve as the minority Whip, Rep. Angela Romero (D-Salt Lake City), who will serve as the Minority Assistant Whip, and Rep. Karen Kwan (D-Murray), who was selected to serve as the Minority Caucus Manager.

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